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ABSTRACT

One component of the National Leadership Grants (NLG) program of the Institution of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is to promote collaboration between museums and libraries. This research assesses NLG program potential and gathers insights to help IMLS facilitate library/museum partnerships. The research: provides an estimate of the percentage of libraries that have engaged in partnerships with museums in the United States within the past 2 years, provides details on partnership activities, and assesses partnership needs. More than three-quarters of all 250 libraries surveyed (77%) have partnered with other organizations within the past 2 years, partnering most often with schools or other educational institutions (80%) or other libraries (78%). Libraries also partner with a variety of private and public organizations, including government agencies (35%), corporations or local businesses (28%), cultural organizations (26%) and private organizations (25%). Academic libraries tend to partner with organizations much like themselves; public libraries tend to engage in cross-sector collaborations. Academic libraries are significantly more likely than public libraries to partner with other libraries (86% versus 71%, respectively). Public libraries are significantly more inclined than academic libraries to partner with government agencies (42% versus 26%, respectively). In general, libraries are less likely to partner with museums than with other institutions. Only 16% report that they are currently partnering with a museum or have done so within the past 2 years. Among those libraries that have not engaged in a museum partnership within the past 2 years, some react favorably to the notion, although nearly as many say they would not consider a museum partnership. Almost half (44%) of those not currently involved in a museum partnership would consider such collaboration in the future. About one-fifth (17%) is undecided. More than any other variable in the survey, availability of outside funding is most predictive of whether libraries that have not recently engaged in partnerships would consider partnering with museums in the future. Recommendations to IMLS are provided. (AEF)

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Identification and Analysis of Library and Museum Partnerships
Final Report

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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

In September 1998, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) began awarding grants under the National Leadership Grants (NLG) program. NLG is intended to enhance education, training, research, demonstration, preservation and digitization in museums and libraries. One component of the NLG program is to promote collaboration between museums and libraries. In October 1998, IMLS contracted Aeffect, Inc. to research and report on the nature, range, and scope of library/museum partnerships in the United States.

The primary objective of this research is to assess NLG program potential and gather insights to help IMLS facilitate library/museum partnerships. More specifically, this research provides an estimate of the percentage of libraries that have engaged in partnerships with museums in the U.S. within the past two years, provides details on partnership activities, and assesses partnership needs.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Library Partnerships

Data provided in this section of the report is based on a sample of 250 library respondents. For the purpose of consistency and clarity in the survey, a partnership was defined as any project in which the library "partnered with another organization on programs or activities to accomplish a common goal." Given this definition, more than three-quarters of all libraries (77%) have partnered with other organizations within the past two years, partnering most often with schools or other educational institutions (80%), or other libraries (78%). To a lesser extent, libraries also partner with a variety of private and public organizations, including government agencies (35%), corporations or local businesses (28%), cultural organizations (26%) and private organizations (25%).

Academic libraries tend to partner with organizations much like themselves, whereas public libraries tend to engage in cross-sector collaborations. More specifically, academic libraries are significantly more likely than public libraries to partner with other libraries (86% vs. 71%, respectively). Public libraries are significantly more inclined than academic libraries to partner with government agencies (42% vs. 26%, respectively).

Library/Museum Partnerships

In general, libraries are less likely to partner with museums than other institutions. Only 16% report that they are currently partnering with a museum or have done so within the past 2 years. Among those libraries that have not engaged in a museum partnership within the past two years, some react favorably to the notion, although nearly as many say they would not consider a museum partnership. More specifically, almost half (44%) of those not currently involved in a museum partnership would consider such a collaboration in the future. Almost two-fifths (39%) say they would be unlikely to consider a museum partnership. About one-fifth (17%) are undecided in whether they would consider a library/museum partnership. More than any other variable in the survey, availability of outside funding is most predictive of whether libraries that have not recently engaged in a partnership would consider partnering with museums in the future.

All respondents evaluate a wide-range of potential benefits when considering museum partnerships. Respondents are most likely to cite access to information, enhanced education, and shared expertise as desirable outcomes from a museum collaboration.

Public libraries are significantly more likely to indicate that having new/improved exhibits would be a main reason to partner with a museum, while academic libraries are more likely to be concerned with digitizing their collections.

Potential Benefit	Public %	Academic %
New/Improved Exhibits	71	56
Digitized Collections	36	60

Qualitative findings further reveal that the opportunity to share resources with one another is a key criterion for those considering partnerships, and an important advantage to those already in partnerships.

> *"The advantage of partnering is to share resources and share the time and energy commitment [of] a project, while at the same time, you're sharing benefits. The whole concept of sharing is, to me, what partnerships are all about." (History Museum)*

In addition to shared resources, respondents also indicate that outside funding, public interest, and internal resources are also frequently named as important considerations.

Criteria	% of libraries
Sharing resources	73
Outside funding	68
Public interest	66
Internal resources	64

Both library/museum partners and non-partners rate overall time investment (57%), type of museum (50%), and the partner museum's prestige or reputation (42%) as less important considerations when considering museum partners.

Partnership Activities

Data provided in the following sections of the report is based a sample of 39 respondents. Thus, percentages should be interpreted with caution due to small base size.

Given the broad definition of "partnership" used in this study, library/museum partnerships described by respondents cover an extremely wide range of activities. Smaller-scale partnership projects include writing a short column for a museum newsletter, displaying artwork and creating exhibit-related bibliographies, distributing free museum admission passes, hosting lectures and workshops, and developing children's summer reading programs. Larger-scale partnership projects include opening new exhibit spaces, cataloging and digitizing collections, creating joint databases, creating digitized exhibits and/or collections on the Internet, opening a Children's Discovery Center, offering computer training, and developing traveling exhibits.

The majority of library/museum partnerships (44%) last two years or less. More specifically, about one-fourth (23%) last three to five years, about one-sixth (17%) last six to ten years, and one-sixth (16%) have ongoing/permanent partnership projects with museums.

Those libraries that currently partner with museums most frequently partner with historic museums or historic houses (n=27). Considerably fewer libraries partner with art museums (n=11), children's

museums (n=9), and science and technology centers (n=7). Botanical gardens, planetariums, natural history museums, and zoos and aquariums are less frequently chosen as library partners (n=4, each).

Satisfaction with Partnerships

Most library/museum partners are satisfied with their experience. The vast majority of libraries (86%) describe their experience as positive. Only a few (14%) indicate being neither positive nor negative about their experience and no one reports a negative experience.

> *"It was just a joy to work with [the museum] and I think they felt it was a joy to work with .us."* [1] *(Children's Library)*
>
> *"For me, this is the biggest, best, most exciting project that I've ever been involved in." (Art Museum)*
>
> *"I've been absolutely amazed by the positive reaction I've gotten from everybody and it was like everybody was really excited." (Academic Library)*

Although libraries typically partner with schools rather than museums, once in a partnership both museum and library partners view their collaborations as a natural fit, given the institutions' similar missions to extend culture and education to their communities. Even though their missions may be similar, some partners feel that communicating their differences to one another is important in establishing and maintaining effective partner relationships.

> *"[We have] similar value systems and our audiences are the same. And our purposes are educational and recreational and quality of life. That's not always the case with a corporate partner." (Public Library)*
>
> *"We had to work at [recognizing] the way the two very different institutions run. It's just rules and procedures being different, and trying to figure out how to work with that, which we did." (History Museum)*
>
> *"[Museums] are not set up like a library to have people walk in the door unannounced and say, 'I want XYZ, now go find it for me'. Whereas we are a public institution, and that is what we do. We understand more what the differences are now." (Public Library)*

Museums and libraries believe that collaboration gives them an opportunity to learn about one another and better appreciate their partner institutions. Partners also feel their current collaborations have created new dialogue between their institutions. Additionally, partnership projects have blossomed into long-term relationships that reach beyond the activities of the original project.

> *"I've learned a lot about libraries, and one thing that's become interesting to me is the different cultures between museums and libraries, which I find fascinating. [I] feel we have a lot to learn from libraries." (Art Museum)*
>
> *"It brought us closer together…We're on a first name basis and we don't hesitate calling one another and asking for a favor." (Public Library)*
>
> *"[The benefit was] probably having the museum establish another personal relationship with the library, not just have the two directors know each other, but have other department heads establishing an ongoing relationship." (History Museum)*

[1] The quotes in the report are from in-depth interviews with library and museum staff who are closely involved in partnership decision-making and/or activities.

"I think that the best benefit for the museum was establishing that relationship that continues today. When we had [the] opportunity to work together and share a free collection of photographs,...the groundwork had already been laid." (History Museum)

Target Audience

More than half (59%) of library/museum partnerships are intended to serve the general public—primarily within the institutions' local community, but also within the larger region. While quantitative findings reveal that less than one-third of partnership projects are intended to benefit specific target audiences such as children (n=12), adults (n=10) or students (n=8), in-depth discussion also reveals that partnerships also frequently target specific ethnic groups.

"We see it (the partnership) as to our benefit because we serve the city of Phoenix and, by extension, everybody in Arizona." (Public Library)

"I think our joint goals are to reach a good portion of Louisiana's population...and for the museum, this is a way that we have of reaching out throughout the state." (History Museum)

"The museum has identified three target audiences that we're looking for...African-Americans, Latinos and families with children between the ages and 5 and 12." (Art Museum)

A few partnership projects target audiences such as researchers (n=6), teachers (n=5), families (n=5) and seniors (n=4). Not surprisingly, public library partnerships tend to target children (n=9), and academic libraries are more likely to target students of high school age or older (n=7).

Target	Public n	Academic n
Children	9	3
Students	1	7

Benefits of Partnership Projects

In-depth discussion reveals that partnership goals frequently focus on reaching out to the community and bringing in underserved audience segments .

"Another main goal...was to really make [museums] accessible to those who may not be able to afford [it] on an ongoing basis." (Public Library)

"[The partnership provides] opportunities...to reach different people who we're not reaching right now. By identifying some of the different sections of the community, we're reaching people that normally don't get that opportunity." (Public Library)

Some museums partner specifically with libraries to tap their expertise in serving the local community, especially children and families. Museums also partner with libraries to broaden their appeal to a wider audience.

"When you go inside the Children's Library you see a space that is so child-friendly, so family-friendly in its seating and its signage and in its staffing. And we feel we have a lot to learn from all those aspects of the library." (Art Museum)

"The museum likes the way the library reaches all types of people from different backgrounds, especially families [with children]." (Public Library)

> *"[The library] is very heavily used by parents and children that are obviously from a broader socioeconomic and ethnic spectrum of our community than the people who visit the art museum." (Art Museum)*

Some decision-makers theorize that if new audiences attend special events that result from a partnership project, they will return to utilize its broader services.

> *"I think [the exhibit] attracts audiences that might not be able to come to the library otherwise. Some [museums] have been able to plan special events around these exhibits so they get more people in the door." (History Museum)*

> *"...One of the goals is to bring in new communities and keep them. So people...[will] come and see an exhibition or participate in a workshop, then they realize 'Well, you know it's not a scary place. I can come back here and get something else.'" (Public Library)*

More than academic libraries, public libraries focus on benefits to the local community. Academic libraries frequently mention institutional benefits such as cataloging collections and sharing resources. Public libraries more often mention benefits such as increasing the number of library and museum visitors, making collections/information available, and enhancing education.

Barriers of Partnership Projects

In-depth discussion reveals a variety of barriers that might prevent museums and libraries from engaging in collaborations. Library and museum staff indicate that they:

Typically do not consider each other as partners
- Have difficulty identifying a suitable or willing partner
- Need to overcome competition between libraries and museums
- Do not have sufficient funding or staff

Some libraries and museums do not see themselves as natural partners because they are not familiar enough with one another and may not necessarily see the benefits of a collaboration. Identifying a suitable partner can be difficult, given that respondents perceive there to be few opportunities for library and museum decision-makers to interact.

> *"If you only know libraries and you don't know another institution and what it has, it's hard to think of how a partnership would [benefit you]...what you would do with a partnership...so it's a matter of knowing enough about each institution and what goes on there to see where there are connections that can be made." (Academic Library)*

> *"Getting those people who are making the policy decisions together so that they begin to see where their commonalties are, I think is going to be really important if we're going to reach beyond the major players in the metropolitan area." (Public Library)*

Some museums and libraries feel a sense of competition, which they say may impede the establishment of new partnerships.

> *"I think initially there has, in the past, been some feeling of competition. I think we are getting past that. Not necessarily [competition] for audience, but for collections." (Public Library)*

> *"Resources are so thin, that in order to be successful in our mission, we must cooperate, we can't be in competition. It is not financially feasible. In terms of funding dollars in the community, in terms of grant dollars available, and in terms of volunteer resources that are available, we need to cooperate." (Public Library)*

Sufficient resources, such as staff and funding, are key to the success of a partnership, especially given that partners indicate that longer-term projects tend to evolve and encounter unexpected barriers along the way.

> *"We actually struggled with our grant...with the amount of commitment we as a staff needed to make to accomplish this grant. We thought we wrote a grant that was well within our capacity and it turned out that we really needed to commit more people." (Art Museum)*

Initiating Partnership Projects

In this sample, library/museum partnerships were most often initiated by the libraries alone or in conjunction with museums. About one-third (34%) were initiated by the library and museum together. Approximately one-third (34%) of partnership projects were initiated by the libraries and one-fifth (21%) were initiated by the museum. A few partnerships (n=5) were initiated by outside parties, such as funding organizations.

> *"[The project started] with a conversation between the directors of the State Museum and the State Library." (History Museum)*

> *[There was] a planning phase where we (library and museum directors) talked about [what we could do]. So [we] talked and talked and talked, and the [current partnership project evolved]." (Public Library)*

> *"The Pew Charitable Trusts invited the art museum to participate. It's a program that they have to help art museums better serve communities through collaborations with community organizations" (Art Museum)*

> *"The project originated from the [state] humanities board and [we] applied for funding provided for honoraria for guest speakers." (History Museum)*

While museums and libraries say their level of commitment to their partnerships is relatively equal, they look to one another to contribute different resources and complement each others' strengths.

> *"The library contributed the research and the writing...[and] we contribute[d] our expertise in terms of doing an exhibition, something that they're not really familiar with." (History Museum)*

Partner institutions most often contribute expertise, staff, management and collections to their projects.

> *"We are contributing space; we are contributing expertise, librarian expertise, public relations." (Public Library)*

Additionally, both types of institutions frequently contribute to decision-making, marketing and promotion, collections, space, materials and supplies, administrative services, and technology. According to their library partners, museums are significantly more likely than libraries to contribute to program design (65% vs. 36%, respectively) as well as provide financial support (57% vs. 28%, respectively) to a project. Qualitative discussion also reveals that partners frequently identify staff support as a key component of project success. They report using full-time, part-time and volunteer staff to support their partnership activities. Larger partnership projects tend to utilize at least one full-time staff member and numerous part-time staff members and volunteers.

Staffing

Smaller partnership projects typically rely on a few staff members from each institution working part-time on the project. Although some larger-scale projects hire one or two individuals who focus entirely on partnership activities, many partnerships rely on whatever time current staff can devote to the initiative.

> *"They have a programmer that's 10 percent...the curator..is 5 percent, and then they had a student to help with the taxonomic work and she's been working 20 hours a week." (Academic Library)*

Many library/museum partners feel that ongoing, planned communication between partner institutions is vital to project success. Most partners communicate informally via phone and e-mail, with occasional staff meetings.

> *"I have a counterpart at the art museum...he and I set up monthly meetings, or even bi-monthly if we need to, as the projects come through." (Public Library)*

> *"Starting this year, there's a bi-weekly staff meeting that just relates to [one component of the project]. [The meeting] is about two hours and [we discuss] programming and how to make it all coordinate and work together." (Public Library)*

Evaluation

Most partners have plans to evaluate their projects using a variety of formal and informal techniques. Some plan to gather relatively basic feedback via visitor counts (n=14) and verbal or written comments (n=7). Others are planning more formal qualitative and quantitative research such as surveys (n=8) or cost/sales analyses (n=2). A few partners do not plan to evaluate their partnership projects at all.

Partners who have already engaged in initial project evaluations feel that periodic evaluations can uncover potential program pitfalls that can be corrected early on in the process.

Resources and Funding

Most partners say their goals are being met with current resources, but that additional resources such as staff or funding may help them expand the reach of their current program or continue to offer it in the future.

> *"I think the goals will be achieved so successfully that then to continue and to grow with it in the next couple years, that they may need resources from other areas." (Public Library)*

Although adequate funding is vital to partnership projects, in-depth discussions reveal that many partners believe more funding would not necessarily make their projects better, now that the projects are in progress.

> *"At this point, no [it could not benefit from additional funding]...people rarely turn down money for things, but at this point I think it's been reasonably supported." (Academic Library)*

> *"In developing our budgets every year, we plan for this. And we plan for what we know we're going to need...We pretty much have met our objective." (History Museum)*

Some partners, however, indicate that more funding would allow them to hire more staff and enhance their offerings.

"More financial resources...would have allowed us to hire more staff. We don't have a lot of time to plan and get people to attend, do the outreach." (Public Library)

"We could have done some extensive oral-history projects, interviewing local people. Instead, we offered a one-time [session] about [how to] do oral history with your family. Because of the staff time, that was all we really had time to arrange." (Public Library)

Most partners participating in this research have relatively small project budgets. About one-fourth (n=10) have a budget of less than $5,000. Only a handful (n=3) of partnerships have budgets in excess of $100,000. Academic library partners have substantially larger project budgets than public library partners. Academic budgets for partnership projects range from about $200 to more than $500,000. Budgets for public library projects range from about $200 to $100,000, although most do not exceed $25,000

Many partnering institutions obtain project funding from their existing institutional budgets. About two-thirds (67%) of all partnership projects are funded in part by the institutions' general operating budgets. Partnership projects also receive funding from outside sources.

Funding	n
Private donations	19
Foundation or endowment	14
State grants	14
Federal grants	9
Corporate sponsorship	8

The majority of all libraries (84%) are unaware of federal or state funding to support partnerships between libraries and museums. However, public library respondents are significantly more likely than academic respondents to be aware of federal and state funding for these partnerships (22% vs. 11%, respectively). Only a few respondents (n=7) are able to name specific funding sources that support library/museum partnerships, such as the IMLS National Leadership Grant, on an unaided basis. Others mention general federal programs, state programs, Museum Association, Regional Library System, Economic Development Fund, and corporate sponsorships. Although few respondents are aware of funding sources, more than three-quarters (78%) of all respondents express interest in receiving information about funding programs that support library/museum partnerships.

CONCLUSIONS

- Libraries have partnered with other organizations in the past two years; however, considerably fewer libraries report recent partnerships with museums.
- Libraries are more likely to partner with businesses, schools, or other libraries.
- When they do partner with one another, museums and libraries tend to work well together given that they share similar missions.
- Almost half of the libraries surveyed would consider museums as future collaborators.
- Libraries and museums tend to partner with institutions from the same city or state.
- Partnerships evolve from informal discussion between library and museum decision-makers, while others result from specific requests made by funding agencies.

- Museums and libraries can experience a variety of benefits from collaborative projects, including access to new audiences and opportunities to share expertise and create unique public programs.

- Partnerships allow museums and libraries to establish long-term relationships that provide a basis for future collaborations.

- As libraries more often partner with historic museums or historic houses, collaborating with a wider variety of museum types represents a new opportunity if the resources exist to support such partnerships.

- While quantitative findings indicate that many partnership projects are intended to serve the general public, in-depth discussion reveals that partnerships are instituted to attract and sustain underserved audience segments.

- Many library/museum partnerships require only one staff member at each institution who devotes 50 percent or less of their time to the project, as well as part-time staff and volunteers.

- Sufficient funding is vital to the success of the partnership. However, not all partnership projects require large awards and some only need a few thousand dollars to accomplish their goals.

- Many partnership projects are small-scaled and have budgets under $5,000.

- Recognizing institutional differences and audience needs is critical in establishing and maintaining partnerships.

- Despite small staff size and budgets, many partners say they are able to accomplish the goals they outlined at the onset of their partnerships.

- Most partners plan to evaluate their projects either formally or informally.

- Many of the barriers to initiating library/museum partnerships can be ameliorated by library and museum staff simply interacting with each other and establishing a dialogue.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Given that most who participate in partnership projects are satisfied with their experience, IMLS should consider communicating the benefits of library/museum partnerships. This can potentially help partnership projects. . .
    - Increase attendance and help reach new audiences
    - Encourage small-scale projects
    - Foster interest in forming projects despite perceptions of inadequate staff support
- Current NLG recipients can serve as mentors to those who are considering such partnerships. As such, IMLS could provide incentives for NLG recipients to. . .
    - Host a library/museum conference at their respective institutions

- Submit articles to museum/library journals, newsletters that discuss effective project processes and potential pitfalls
- Present "process" and "pitfall" issues at museum and library conferences
- Develop a mentor or resource list of library/museum partners who are willing to provide guidance to others considering collaborations.

- IMLS should continue to publicize NLG as libraries generally are not familiar with IMLS and are interested in receiving information about funding.

- In addition to considering larger awards provided by IMLS, libraries and museums could consider seeking resources to support small-scale library/museum partnerships or to enable partners to implement a pilot study prior to developing larger-scale projects.

- IMLS could serve as a communication link between libraries and museums. More specifically, IMLS could:

  Disseminate project ideas or information about current projects via Web site, conferences, newsletters, and direct mail

  Disseminate information about other agencies that fund library/museum partnerships, such as the Pew Charitable Trusts.

- IMLS or professional organizations could sponsor functions/services that allow library and museum staff to interact with each other, including. . .
  - Regional and state conferences that would unite library and museum decision-makers
  - Forums, such as Internet chat rooms for library and museum staff to discuss relevant topics
  - Internet services that link libraries and museums to those who are interested in a partnering relationship

METHODOLOGY

To estimate the number of existing library/museum partnerships, Aeffect conducted nationwide telephone interviews with 250 library staff responsible for library relationships with outside organizations. For the purpose of consistency and clarity in the survey, a partnership was defined as any project in which the library "partnered with another organization on programs or activities to accomplish a common goal." Public and academic libraries were included in the study as they represent the largest library types served by IMLS. A sample size of n=250 yields a maximum margin of error +/- 6% at the 95% confidence level. Aeffect conducted 125 surveys with library staff from academic libraries and 125 with staff from public libraries. Participating libraries included those from many areas of the country, including libraries in urban, suburban and rural areas. Libraries were randomly selected from comprehensive lists of public and academic libraries across the country.

Respondents included those who have recently partnered with museums (partners) and those not currently involved in a library/museum partnership (non-partners). All respondents, partners and non-partners, were asked the perceived importance of certain criteria in considering museum partners,

such as availability of funding, the type of partner, and public interest. Partners also provided detailed information about their projects, such as type of museum partner, specific project activities and goals, length of partnership, and project budget and funding sources

As a supplement to the telephone surveys, Aeffect conducted 13 one-hour in-depth interviews (IDIs) with library and museum staff who are currently involved in partnership projects. Typically, 10-15 IDIs are necessary before trends or patterns appear in the qualitative data set. For this study, sufficient trends appeared after 13 interviews.

IDIs were designed to illuminate quantitative findings and provide details of specific partnership projects to obtain a better understanding of project goals, benefits and barriers to partnership projects, target audience(s), required resources, such as funding and staff and communication between organizations.

- IDI participants are closely involved in decision-making and/or day-to-day project activities.
- Respondents represent public and academic libraries, and various types of museums.
  - Library partners included six public libraries and two academic.
  - Museum partners included two history museums, two art museums and one history/natural science museum.
- Three sets of partners were interviewed to obtain a more complete understanding of their projects.